



February 24, 2023
Leslie Bumpus, Dentist
Department of Corrections
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten and Representative Walker, my name is Dr. Leslie Bumpus and I am one of the lead dentists for the Department of Corrections. I'm a public health graduate student at UCONN and I also serve as an 1199 union delegate.

As a Dentist I treat infection, diagnose disease, and educate patients on oral health and disease prevention. I relieve people's pain and I restore missing teeth to attain a better quality of life. I am proud of the work I do, however, all of our dental staff are severely underpaid compared to the private sector and several other states. This is significant because low pay makes it nearly impossible to recruit and hire Dentists to work for the Department of Correction.

Our patients are constitutionally entitled to receive adequate, timely, and equitable healthcare. They must be provided with annual dental exams, treatment plans must be followed, and decreasing health inequities are all crucial components of the job. With 10,000 incarcerated individuals and only 10 dentists serving this population, routine and preventative care cannot be performed. A simple filling diagnosed a year ago eventually turns into a tooth extraction because we are constantly putting out fires and only able to treat emergency pain and infections. Oral cancer screenings should be performed on every single patient as dentists are able to catch oral cancer at an early stage. It is not unheard of that cancer is caught at a later stage due to inadequate patient to staff ratios. Late stage cancer and constant tooth extractions negatively impacts this particularly vulnerable population in more ways than one. DOC has had a handful of dental applicants for the open Dentist positions, but nearly all of them have turned down the position due to the current pay and benefit package.

To have the capacity to ACTUALLY provide quality care--the number of dentists, dental assistants, and dental hygienists must be increased by 34. The continued short staffing will lead to foreseeable harm to our patients as there is just not enough staff to treat everyone in a timely manner. The state has the responsibility to provide equitable health services for our patients. Incarcerated individuals are entitled to the same rights and level of healthcare as people that are not incarcerated, however, a health disparity still exists as we do not have an adequate amount of healthcare personnel.

Lastly, I would like to add that I serve on the 1199NE DOC Recruitment and Retention Sub Committee. We have spoken with our mental health staff, medical providers, dental providers, discharge planners, etc. to determine what each group needs to provide even the minimum standard of care for our patients. Across the board – all of the healthcare and mental health staff want to provide quality care, but are often unable to because of the staffing crisis. Inadequate staffing levels will perpetuate health disparities. We have the resources to do whatever it takes to recruit quality healthcare staff, but this is simply not being done.

To address years of systemic understaffing of inmate medical services, expand access and improve the quality of healthcare and mental health care services for the incarcerated, \$20 million must be allocated to the DOC Health care line item. We must allocate \$30 million for recruitment and retention of healthcare staff across all state agencies, including DOC. Access to healthcare is a human right that we must invest in, especially in one of the richest states in the country with an astronomical budget surplus. Thank you for your time.